

Black History Month 2014: The Native Sons and Daughters of Alabama

Honoring Johnnie Carr During Black History Month 2014

March 4, 2014

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of continuing the 7th district's commitment to honoring influential African Americans that were sons and daughters of Alabama. Today, it is my great privilege to pay homage to Mrs. Johnnie Carr, a heroine of the Civil Rights movement and a pioneer of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In Alabama, this stalwart is referenced for her lifetime devotion to ensuring that America lived up to its ideals of freedom and equality for all.

This phenomenal woman was born on January 26, 1911 in Montgomery Alabama to John and Annie Daniels. She was educated at "Miss White's Industrial School for Girls," a private institution devoted to educating young women of color. She went on to complete coursework in nursing before launching a public service career that would continue throughout her lifetime.

During the 1930s, Mrs. Carr found her calling as a foot soldier and started with a campaign to help raise funds for the defense of the Scottsboro Boys. This historic case involved nine black men who were falsely accused of raping two white women in 1931. During this time, she also became active in the NAACP and served as secretary and youth coordinator for the organization.

In 1964, Mrs. Carr and her husband, Arlam Carr also broke barriers in public education in Montgomery. The couple filed a suit against the Montgomery Board of Education in effort to allow their son to attend an all white high school. The monumental court case, Carr v. Montgomery County Board of Education, is referenced as a landmark decision that led to the desegregation of public schools in Montgomery, Alabama. Despite constant death threats the Carrs remained committed to the cause and eventually won the case on June 2, 1969. As a result, their son, Arlam Jr., was one of 13 black students to integrate Sydney Lanier High School.

In addition to their contribution to the integration of public schools, Mrs. Carr and her husband would also become pillars in efforts to desegregate the Montgomery bus system. In December of 1955, shortly after Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, the Carrs agreed to follow local buses in their personal vehicle to monitor the success of the demonstration. The couple also transported blacks that needed rides to work and provided an alternative to using the segregated bus system in Montgomery.

During the demonstration, Mrs. Carr was named president of the Montgomery Improvement Association in 1967. The organization was initially formed to oversee the bus boycotts but the entity would eventually play a huge role in ending segregation in the city of Montgomery. Mrs. Carr remained at the helm of the organization until her death in 2008. In 1984, Mrs. Carr joined "One Montgomery", an organization dedicated to improving race relations in Montgomery. Later in life, she became a celebrated lecturer on her experiences during the civil rights movement.

Throughout her lifetime, Mrs. Carr's steadfast leadership broke barriers as she boldly tackled the injustices of her time. She was at the forefront of blazing trails for me and so many others. This amazing woman was dedicated to serving as a conduit for social change. Against insurmountable odds, she remained committed to her calling. Today, we honor this great woman of strength and reflect on the countless contributions she has made to the state of Alabama and this nation.

As a benefactor of Mrs. Carr's efforts, it is indeed an honor to share her story with our nation. As we reflect on all that she has given, let us commit to honoring her legacy by never forgetting her role in American history. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Mrs. Johnnie Carr, an American hero.